

# SESSION 1: CONNECTED IN CHRIST

## EPHESIANS 2:17-22

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### *Ephesians 2:17-18*

Paul's theme in the latter half of Ephesians 2 is that, through His death, Jesus "tore down the dividing wall of hostility" (v. 14) between believing Jews and Gentiles, causing them to be at peace with one another as one new people of God. This happened because when Christ came, He **proclaimed the good news of peace to those who were far away and peace to those who were near**.

The church in Ephesus consisted of both Gentiles and Jews. Paul referred to the Gentiles as you **who were far away**. Ephesians 2:12 explains Paul's meaning. The Gentiles were "without the Messiah, excluded from the citizenship of Israel, and foreigners to the covenants of the promise, with no hope and without God in the world." All this was true of Gentiles before they were saved. **Those who were near** refers to Jews prior to their conversion. They were nearer salvation than Gentiles because they had the hope of a Messiah; they were God's chosen nation; they had the covenants of promise and therefore hope. But apart from personally accepting Christ, Jews were as greatly in need of salvation as Gentiles.

Although Jews had been **near**, they did not think of themselves as having intimate access to God. The entire sacrificial system reminded them of their sins and the unapproachable holiness of God. Now all believers can come to God intimately, as our **Father**. Our connection to God is granted **by one Spirit**, given alike to all believers, whether Jew or Gentile, male or female, free or slave, rich or poor.

Paul referred to Jesus as **Christ** (the Messiah), emphasizing His role as the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecies that Gentiles did not know. When He came, **He proclaimed the good news of peace to Gentiles as well as to Jews**. This **peace** comes through a person who is Jesus Christ. As Paul said "He is our peace" (v. 14). Jesus provided peace with God and peace between all the children of God. The barrier of sin has been overcome through His death on the cross.

All must come to the Father **through Him**. There is only one way of salvation; there is only one **access...to the Father**. (The term access was used of a royal court in which subjects were granted an audience with their king.) Jesus' death did not automatically unite all Jews and all Gentiles into one body; neither did it automatically reconcile all persons to God. Yet His death was essential. The death of Jesus is the only means by which **we both**—Jews and Gentiles—**have access** to God.

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### *Ephesians 2:19*

The result of Christ's message of peace is an entirely new entity, a new humanity—the church of Christ on earth. Jesus brings all believers into God's family, the church.

Changing from a political (citizenship) to a domestic (family) metaphor, Paul emphasized the unity of all believers by describing them as members of God's household, a position formerly occupied solely by Israel.

Paul understood that all believers, whatever their racial ancestry, have been united into one people in His body, the church. The two beams of Christ's cross symbolize the two ways in which we now have peace. The vertical beam reminds us that through His death we have peace with God. The horizontal beam reminds us that we are united with all believers. The challenge we face in our day is to express these truths by living in peace with one another.

Paul used three metaphors in verses 19-22 (citizens, family, and temple) to speak about how we are to understand our relationship to other believers. First he addressed Gentile Christians in particular when he stated **you are no longer foreigners and strangers, but fellow citizens with the saints**. Those who were far away now are citizens of the kingdom of God, along with all other believers (saints). **Saints**, or "holy ones," was one of Paul's favorite designations for Christians. **Saints** refers to all those who experience reconciliation to God through faith in Jesus Christ and who constitute one body, the church.

The **you** language throughout this passage refers to those born as Gentiles. Such believers are **no longer** what they were. The expression **foreigners and strangers** is a comprehensive one that includes all persons who for various reasons did not enjoy the full privileges of citizenship in a particular country. In this context, the word **foreigners** was a reminder of their previous deprivation as those "excluded from the citizenship of Israel" (2:12). The term **strangers** was a reminder that Gentiles had no knowledge of "the covenants of the promise" (2:12). The Ephesians had once been foreigners and strangers in relationship to God's kingdom. However, since becoming believers their status had changed dramatically. In the new humanity Jews and Gentiles together are **fellow citizens** with one another in the kingdom of God. **The saints** may refer either to Old Testament people or to all believers in the church (1:1). If the term citizens suggests that Jewish and Gentile believers are part of the same kingdom, then **members of God's household** means that both groups belong equally to God's one true family.

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## Ephesians 2:20-22

In these verses Paul used the metaphor of a building to clarify what it means to be a part of the church. Building construction begins with a foundation. The **apostles and prophets** were the **foundation** of the church in the sense of being the ones who laid the foundation by preaching the gospel. Churches today stand only when they depend on the foundational truths God revealed to the apostles and prophets, now preserved in the Scriptures. But **Christ Jesus Himself** is the solid foundation on which His church is built.

Jesus also is **the cornerstone**. Builders used a cornerstone to connect two walls, align them, hold them together, and strengthen them. In ancient times important buildings had a massive cornerstone that was essential to keep the building in line and holding it together. This language was borrowed from the Old Testament (see Ps. 118:22; Isa. 28:16). Jesus Christ, **the cornerstone** of His church, is the only sure foundation of faith.

The term **whole building** does not refer to an actual structure but to the church as the people of God who are His new temple. Individual believers are compared to the stones being added to **the whole building**. Each believer is **fitted together** by the Master Builder, who places each stone as He desires. The words **holy sanctuary** (traditionally, temple) imply this building was set apart for God's use. The Ephesians were well acquainted with the unholy temples in their city. They knew well that the whole idea of a temple was to serve as a house or dwelling place for a god. (See Acts 19:23-34.)

As Paul concluded this section of his letter, he emphasized the ongoing process by which Jesus is building His church. He wrote **you also are being built together for God's dwelling in the Spirit**. Paul's return to **you** language in verse 22 reminded his readers again that they had been included in God's plan. They were **being built together** with Jewish Christians to become God's **dwelling** place on earth. It wasn't the stone-and-gold temple in Jerusalem but instead God's new people the church in which **the Spirit** was present. God's new humanity, scattered around the world but meeting in local congregations, is His home. What He is building through the ages, as more and more people believe and are added to His body, will one day be complete (see Rev. 21:5).

## SESSION 2: CONNECTED IN UNITY

### EPHESIANS 4:1-6

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## Ephesians 4:1-2

Chapter 4 marks a transition in Paul's Letter to the Ephesians. Beginning in chapter 4, Paul stressed the importance of the Ephesians to walk (live) in unity. The word **therefore** is the pivot word for the entire epistle. Paul was saying, "On the basis of everything I have written so far, certain results should follow." He made clear that being a member of God's holy household carries responsibilities for daily living.

Paul's reference to himself as the **prisoner in the Lord** indicates that he was a prisoner at the time he wrote this letter. Many Bible students think Paul's captivity was in Rome during what is traditionally called the "first Roman imprisonment." He was a prisoner because he had faithfully followed God's calling to preach the gospel of Christ. From his prison Paul exhorted the Ephesian believers to **walk worthy of the calling** they had received.

In God's household, as in any family, certain standards for behavior are expected. To **walk worthy of the calling** the Ephesians had received meant that they would live in a manner appropriate to those they were as "fellow citizens with the saints, and members of God's household" (2:19). The **calling** was their calling to receive God's gracious salvation in Jesus Christ and to live in unity as believing Gentiles and Jews. To **walk worthy** then meant that the Ephesians would act in a united way, would live in peace in the church with Jewish believers if one was a Gentile, and vice versa.

Paul did not leave the Ephesians in any uncertainty concerning the manner God expected them **to walk**, for he described the appropriate behavior with three virtues and two actions. The first virtue was **humility**. Humility is a proper assessment of one's self in regard to others. Being humble is not having a poor self-image. On the contrary, humility describes a believer who adopts the attitude exemplified by Jesus (see Phil. 2:5-8). The second virtue, **gentleness**, suggests gracious consideration for others and restraint when wronged. A gentle believer is a person whose emotions are under control. Self-assertion is the opposite of gentleness. **Patience**, the third virtue, is the opposite of being "short tempered" and usually involves putting up with disagreeable people and situations. It is perseverance even under affliction. A patient believer does not seek revenge when wronged.

The verb translated **accepting one another** literally means "to endure," "to put up with," "to show forbearance." Paul, however, did not urge a mere grudging acceptance of another person and his or her objectionable ways. Christians are to accept **one another in love**.

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## Ephesians 4:3

Paul admonished the Ephesians that their daily behavior should be characterized by **diligently keeping the unity of the Spirit with the peace that binds**.

In our last session we focused on unity as a gift we've been given through Christ. Unity is based on Christ's sacrificial death and produced in God's household by the Holy Spirit. **The unity of the Spirit** already exists in Christ. Thus our responsibility is not to manufacture unity, but to preserve it. We cannot create spiritual unity among diverse members of Christ's body, but we can and should maintain the unity already created **by the Spirit**. Therefore, Paul urged the Ephesians to relate to one another by **diligently keeping** the unity they enjoyed.

The Greek word translated **diligently** conveys the idea of zealous effort. It means "taking great pains" or "making every effort" with a sense of urgency. The word is derived from a Greek word that literally means "speed" and indicates a continuous effort. Maintaining unity in the church is not a matter we can take lightly. Rather, we are to do everything we can to guard and nurture our spiritual unity with one another. **Keeping** in this verse means to preserve what already exists, namely the Spirit-created unity.

Paul exhorted his readers to keep this unity **with the peace that binds us**. Peace keeps potential factions from occurring. Paul had in mind peace between Jews and Gentiles in the church and between all other kinds of diverse groups in the church. Unity (harmony or oneness) is not the same as uniformity (standardization or sameness). Believers preserve unity when they make peace with one another their major priority.

The noun translated "unity" occurs only twice in the New Testament—in Ephesians 4:3,13. The ideal of God's people living and working together for the good of the larger group, however, is scattered throughout Scripture: "How good and pleasant it is when brothers can live together" (Ps. 133:1). "May they all be one, as You, Father, are in Me and I am in You. May they also be one in Us, so the world may believe You sent Me" (John 17:21). "The multitude of those who believed were of one heart and soul" (Acts 4:32). "Fulfill my joy by thinking the same way, having the same love, sharing the same feelings, focusing on one goal" (Phil. 2:2).

Paul will spend the next three verses elaborating on the basis of oneness in the church.

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## Ephesians 4:4-6

In these verses Paul listed seven "ones" as the basis for the unity in the church. The bottom line is that Christian unity (one body, one hope, one faith, and one baptism) arises out of the Trinitarian unity of God (one Spirit, one Lord, and one Father—listed in the reverse of our usual order).

The **one body** refers to the "one new man" (2:15), the body of Christ, the church in the present age. In Paul's day, there was not a Jewish church and a Gentile church. God created only one worldwide body of believers, of which local congregations are visible expressions. The **one Spirit** refers to the Holy Spirit who indwells the church as a body of believers and every individual believer in the church. **One Spirit** is the reason there is only one church. There is not a Jewish Holy Spirit and a Gentile Holy Spirit (or a Baptist Holy Spirit and a non-Baptist Holy Spirit). The one Spirit of God has given rise to only one body of Christ (see Acts 2). The **one hope** to which believers are called is the hope of eternal life (see Titus 3:7), complete and final salvation. The **one Lord** is Jesus Christ who is the head of the church. **One faith** points to the only way that anyone can become part of the body of Christ. Faith alone in Christ alone is the shared experience of all those who are in Christ. There has always been only one means by which a person can be saved from sin: faith. The **one baptism** refers to the baptism described by Paul in 1 Corinthians 12:13, which is baptism by the Holy Spirit that unites all believers into the body of Christ at the moment of conversion to Christ. Water baptism symbolizes this spiritual baptism, and Paul likely had both Spirit baptism and water baptism in mind by the phrase one baptism.

The church's unity is based on the foundational truth that there is only **one God and Father of all**, the word **all** referring to all believers. God is the Father of all who believe in Christ; they are His children. He lives in them all. And God the Father is **above all**, meaning He is the sovereign Ruler over His church family and every individual member of His family.

These seven unities—three related to the Trinity and four related to the church—are eternally true in God's purposes and plan. Realizing these truths will help us live together in unity.

## SESSION 3: CONNECTED IN GROWTH

### EPHESIANS 4:11-16

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#### *Ephesians 4:11-12*

In 4:1-6 Paul stressed the unity of the body of Christ, then in verse 7 he turned to the matter of believers' spiritual gifts and the diverse ministry of their gifts. Paul indicated that every member of the body of Christ has a vital contribution to make. Elsewhere, Paul pointed out that God gives gifts of grace for the edification of Christ's body (see Rom. 12:3-8; 1 Cor. 12-14). In verse 11 Paul spoke of these gifts to His church as gifted people. Those who receive spiritual gifts from Christ are themselves Christ's gifts to the church who serve the church in various capacities.

The first gifted believers Paul mentioned are **apostles**. Apostles (literally, "sent ones") refers to those Christ personally commissioned. These were essential for the foundation of the church (2:20). There are no more apostles in this sense, although today's cross-cultural missionaries are similar in the sense they are sent out by the Lord. Other gifted believers are **prophets**. The word prophets comes from a Greek word that means "one who speaks." Some prophets declared new revelation for believers (see Acts 11:28; 21:10-11; Eph. 3:5). Most prophets, however, simply preached truth God had already revealed. Prophets speak "to people for edification, encouragement, and consolation" (1 Cor. 14:3). **Evangelists** are missionaries who preach the good news about Christ both at home and abroad (see Acts 21:8). Evangelists can make the gospel especially clear and relevant to unbelievers. Every Christian is called on to be a witness for Christ, but some are especially capable in this area. In a local congregation, gifted evangelists will encourage other believers in how to reach persons for Christ. God also has gifted the church with **pastors and teachers**. The Greek construction suggests that a pastor and teacher are not two different people but the same person. Pastors and teachers served as overseers of local churches in the first century (see 1 Tim. 3:2; Titus 1:7-9; 1 Pet. 5:1-3) and do so today.

Paul expressed the purpose for which Christ gives gifted people to the church. They are to prepare other believers to minister and thus build up the church. He explained this purpose in three phrases: (1) **training of the saints**, (2) **in the work of ministry**, and (3) **to build up the body of Christ**. This means that all believers are responsible for accomplishing the ministry of the church, not just gifted leaders. The calling of gifted leaders is to build up believers so they can do the work of ministry.

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#### *Ephesians 4:13*

How long will the church need gifted leaders to build up believers for the work of ministry? Paul answered that in verse 13. The church will continue to need Christ's gifts until the body of Christ has reached full maturity as **measured by Christ's fullness**.

If you were to ask the question, What is Christ's purpose for His church? you would most likely get a variety of answers. One person might say the church's ultimate purpose is evangelism for in Matthew 28:18-20 Jesus gave the church the Great Commission to make disciples and in the Book of Acts the Holy Spirit came on believers to empower them to witness about Christ (see Acts 1:8). Another individual might respond that the church's great purpose is to perform deeds of mercy for needy people—feed the hungry, clothe those without proper clothing, care for sick individuals, give shelter to strangers, and visit persons in prison (see Matt. 25:31-46). A third person might respond that Christ's great purpose for His church is worship. Christians meet together to praise and glorify God. The Bible clearly teaches that God calls believers to evangelism, serve, and worship and is pleased when they do so.

In Ephesians, however, Paul answered the question regarding the church's purpose a bit differently. He depicted the church's purpose using the imagery of a body that requires its members to exercise their various gifts in order for the body to grow in Christlikeness and attain maturity. Spiritual leaders train believers to use their individual gifts for the purpose of building up the body of Christ until we all reach maturity. This great goal of spiritual maturity is accomplished only when believers work together over time to achieve it.

In 4:3 Paul had urged believers to be "diligently keeping the unity of the Spirit." Now the term unity occurs as one goal toward which believers (with diverse gifts) are working together. This unity is both doctrinal (**in the faith**) and relational (**in the knowledge of God's Son**). Doctrinal unity does not mean uniformity in every matter of biblical interpretation, but it does mean that true Christianity is recognized as a shared set of core beliefs. Relational unity means that true Christianity is a living relationship with Jesus. It is more than knowing about Him; it is knowing Him. The end in view is **Christ's fullness**. God is working through His gifts to His people to reproduce in them the character of Christ—His servant attitude, His unselfishness, His love, kindness, compassion, humility, holiness, willingness to suffer wrong for others, forgiveness, and so much more that was true of Christ's life and ministry.

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## Ephesians 4:14-16

Paul noted two illustrations of what happens when believers work together. The first is drawn from human development. Individual believers grow from infancy (**little children**) to adulthood (“a mature man,” 4:13). The second illustration is from sea life. Believers who work together will not be like a storm-tossed boat, upset by the **waves and blown around by every wind**. To be sure, there will always be false teaching to confront. There will be **human cunning with cleverness**. There will be **techniques of deceit** trying to lead believers astray. But Christians who have worked together to develop a clear understanding of the faith and who know Christ intimately will survive such attacks.

The cure for immaturity and instability is **speaking the truth**. Yet this truth is to be expressed **in love**—with compassion and understanding. Truth without love can be cold and harsh; love without truth can be mushy and weak. When members of a church intentionally embrace both truth and love, they **will grow in every way into ... Christ** and reject the false teachings mentioned in verse 14.

Paul returned to the illustration of human development, but with a twist. This time he thought of a single body (rather than of many little children). It has a Head (Jesus Christ; see 4:15 and 5:23), who directs all the operations (**from Him**). At the same time, the **body** (the local congregation) has many parts that need to work together. An individual church member is a **supporting ligament** or an individual part (see also 1 Cor. 12:14-21). Each part has been **fitted and knit together** by the Lord with all the other parts. With the **proper working** of each part, the body will do what it’s supposed to do. When believers in a congregation function properly, this promotes the growth of the body for **building up itself in love**.

## SESSION 4: CONNECTED THROUGH WORDS

### EPHESIANS 4:25-32

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#### Ephesians 4:25-28

All Christians have responsibility for group unity and group maturity, as we saw in the previous session. In this passage Paul pointed out a series of individual behavioral changes each believer should adopt to better facilitate the group unity and maturity.

We believers are to put away lying as a filthy garment and replace it with truthful speech. Paul’s biblical source was Zechariah 8:16, “Speak truth to one another.” How can we love our neighbors if we deceive them? Furthermore, truth telling is especially important in the life of the church—**because we are members of one another**. We should be able to trust one another. Falsehood discovered is a guaranteed way to destroy Christian fellowship. (Paul was not suggesting that we have any “wiggle room” to lie to non-Christians.)

The fabric of unity within the body of Christ is woven with mutual love, trust, and respect. Lies destroy trust and respect and erode love. Believers should be forthright and honest in what they say at home, at church, at work, and at play. Remember, Satan is the “father of lies” (John 8:44).

The wording that Paul took from Psalm 4:4 (**Be angry and do not sin**) should be understood to mean “Do not sin when you are angry.” Although anger is not in itself wrong, how we respond to anger can be. Anger may lead us to positive, constructive actions. For example, anger can lead us to work toward honest reconciliation or to correct an injustice. Anger also may lead us to take negative, destructive actions, that is, to sin, such as striking back in vengeance. When we nurse anger into a seething bitterness, we give the devil a foothold to invade and corrupt our lives. For our own good, we are to resolve anger quickly (before the end of the day).

To **steal** is to violate the Eighth Commandment. It is not enough for believers just to avoid the negative. Rather, a Christian is to **do honest work with his own hands** so that stealing isn’t necessary. Believers are to support themselves and their families if this is at all possible. Sometimes people need a helping hand up, so the right thing to do is to work hard so that we can be generous to anyone in need.

Paul did not challenge believers to work hard for the purpose of becoming wealthy and enjoying a life of luxury but for the purpose of earning enough to **share with anyone in need**. The Christian life is focused on relationships and helping others, not on material gain and all that is associated with affluence.

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#### Ephesians 4:29-30

**Foul language** translates a word meaning “rotten, unfit for use.” Paul meant what is vulgar, crude, or abusive—the kind of speech becoming more and more tolerated these days. But this is a characteristic of the non-Christian lifestyle that believers have renounced. What is to replace it? Speech that is intentionally good for the **building up** of others (see Prov. 15:23). As believers, we can seek to help by our speech rather than to hurt. When this happens, we are giving evidence that God’s grace has succeeded in our own lives and that we are actively extending grace to those who hear us speak.



Our words reveal our hearts. Loving hearts speak loving words. What we say and how we say it matters. Jesus said we would have to give an account for “every careless word” (Matt. 12:36).

Paul challenged his readers to understand that God’s Spirit grieves when we express hostility to others, in attitude, speech, or actions. Parents **grieve** when their children squabble. How much more must the Spirit lament when believers squabble with one another? After all, He is Holy, and He intends for us to become more and more holy (unlike the Devil, who wants us to fall into more and more sin, 4:27). This is why He **sealed** us when we were converted.

The verb translated **sealed** means to mark with a seal or to mark with approval. In ancient times, a signet ring engraved with an image or crest would be pressed into wax, thus “sealing” an object such as a scroll. The impression left was a seal. The owner of the signet ring owned the object sealed. Three ideas were connected with sealing: ownership, protection, and proof of genuineness (or approval). Paul used the noun form three times, all figuratively. In two of these, he meant ownership (see Rom. 4:11; 2 Tim. 2: 19); in the third he meant proof of genuineness (see 1 Cor. 9:2). The apostle used the verb four times. One indicates proof (see Rom. 15:28). In the other three instances, the Holy Spirit—engraved in the believer by God—is the Seal marking believers as owned by God, under His protection, and approved “for the day of redemption” (1 Cor. 1:22; Eph. 1:13; 4:30).

The Spirit will keep us secure for the **day of redemption**, meaning the time of Christ’s return (see Luke 21:28). Thus, from the beginning of our Christian life when we were sealed until the end when we are fully redeemed, we are to grow in being like Christ.

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## ***Ephesians 4:31-32***

In verses 22-24 Paul had used the notion of taking off (the old self) and putting on (the new self) in reference to the decisive change that happened at conversion. Here he used similar language to speak of six sinful attitudes and actions. Believers constantly seek to keep these **removed from** their lives. They are all poisonous to personal relationships.

**Bitterness** can be translated “sourness,” referring to a cynical or resentful outlook. **Anger** refers to an outburst of rage or a flash of irritation expressed. When applied to people, **wrath** is a settled, simmering disposition of hostility. (But see 5:6 for God’s wrath.) The term translated **shouting** may also be translated “clamor,” “crying,” or “brawling.” It refers to loud voices raised in a quarrel or in a brawl. **Slander** means speaking evil of others, wishing to hurt their reputation. Malice can also be translated “evil” or “wickedness.” **Malice** is ill will that seeks opportunity to harm another person. This attitude may sum up all the preceding items on Paul’s list.

In contrast to the six vices are three virtues by which believers are to relate to one another. These are God-like qualities He has extended to us (just as God also). **Kind** means caring or showing love practically (see 2:7 for God’s kindness). **Compassionate** (tenderhearted) refers to being moved on one’s insides in response to a need and then acting. The Greek word for **forgiving**, based on the same root word as the word for grace, means to exercise grace in forgiving. Paul’s use of the present tense signifies that forgiving is to be the habitual practice of believers toward one another. Paul pointed out specifically that this is a God-like quality. We are to forgive one another **just as God also forgave us in Christ**. Why did God forgive us in Christ? Because we proved how sorry we were? Because we had suffered sufficiently for our offenses? Because we had paid “the pound of flesh”? No. God forgave us in Christ because of His love, grace, and mercy. Consequently, we too are to forgive other believers Christ loves and for whom He died.

When a believer lives by Paul’s commands in verses 25-32, that person has a positive impact on the church’s life and can move others to live by these principles.

## ***SESSION 5: CONNECTED IN SERVICE***

### ***EPHESIANS 5:15-21***

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## ***Ephesians 5:15-17***

The general exhortation **pay careful attention** covers all the particular instructions that follow. Paul’s concern was for believers to think carefully about how they **walk**. He had used this same verb earlier in the letter as a way to speak about lifestyle or behavior (see 2:2,10; 4:1,17; 5:2,8). The apostle noted two contrasting ways to live. One is the way of the **unwise**; the other is the way of the **wise**. God’s wisdom has already been lavished on believers (1:8; see also 1:17; 3:10). Thus to live wisely is simply to live in accordance with the principles for success God has made clear through His Word.

Wise people make **the most of the time**. The noun translated time (Greek, *kairos* [KIGH rahs], not *chronos* [KROH nahs]) refers primarily to the opportunities or occasions that come our way. The verb rendered **making the most of** is literally “redeem” or “buy back.” Once gone, wasted opportunities can never be recovered. Thus we are called to take advantage of the moments as we are given them.

Believers are to take care to use opportunities to the full **because the days are evil**. Paul did not mean that his times were necessarily worse than other times. Though we may sometimes feel this way, our times are no more difficult a time in which to live a Christian life than those of earlier generations. Until Jesus returns, spiritual forces of evil will be furiously at work in the world (see Eph. 6:12). All times are challenging for living as a follower of Jesus. Thus believers should beware of our natural tendency to fritter away time.

A second sign of wisdom is commitment to **the Lord’s will**. It is a special mark of being **foolish** (“unwise,” v. 15) not to take into account what God has already made clear as His intentions and commands for living. Here are a few New Testament teachings that are specifically stated as the will of God for believers:

- To give thanks in all things (1 Thess. 5:18)
- To do good and thus put to silence one’s persecutors (1 Pet. 2:15)
- To abstain from sexual immorality (1 Thess. 4:3)

These are aspects of God’s “general will”—applicable to every believer. But what about His “particular will” for specific persons or congregations? (Whom shall I marry? Whom should we call as our next pastor?) Certainly there is such a particular will of God. For example, Paul referred to his call to become an apostle as God’s will (see Eph. 1:1). When we believers have fully committed ourselves to following God’s general will for all Christians—what is plainly revealed in the Scriptures—only then may we ask with confidence for His guidance as to His particular will for our lives. We may not find this revelation in “chapter and verse.” We will find, however, that there are Scripture principles that guide us. Furthermore, after careful thought, prayer, and seeking counsel of mature believers, we can discern with confidence God’s will for a particular situation.

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## ***Ephesians 5:18***

What is the role of the Holy Spirit in believers’ lives? Scripture uses a variety of terms, such as “indwelt” and “sealed.” Christian denominations have discussed and debated this important issue for hundreds of years. Competing interpretations of the Spirit’s ministry have often been divisive. What we cannot doubt, however, is that Paul wanted every follower of Jesus to be filled with the Spirit. These verses do not tell us everything we would like to know about being Spirit-filled, but they provide essential insights.

One common characteristic of a non-Christian lifestyle is getting drunk, whether with **wine** or other intoxicating beverages and substances. Those under the influence of alcohol often feel empowered to perform **reckless actions**, as both first-century civilization and our twenty-first century world knows all too well.

In this verse, however, Paul was not so much focused on condemning intoxication as he was on using drunkenness as a contrast to what (or, rather, Who) should empower Jesus’ followers: the Spirit. Unlike being under the influence of alcohol—which involves losing control—the Spirit affects us for good, enabling us to become more godly in our character as well as to perform loving acts of Christian ministry. The Spirit provides a joyful way of living that far surpasses the “joy” of wine. In the original New Testament language, the phrase translated **be filled with the Spirit** is in a grammatical form that means “keep on letting the Spirit fill you.” As a command, the implication is that the filling is His work. We are to be receptive and to cooperate with Him on a never-ending basis.

For a person to be “filled” or “full” of something (or Someone) is to be motivated and empowered by that thing (or Person). The first Bible person named as being filled with the Spirit is Bezalel (see Ex. 31:3), who oversaw the tabernacle’s construction. Joshua was “filled with the spirit of wisdom” to lead Israel (see Deut. 34:9). Micah prophesied because he was Spirit-filled (see Mic. 3:8). Luke is the only Gospel writer to mention persons “filled” or “full” of the Spirit: John, Elizabeth, Zechariah, and Jesus (see 1:15,41,67; 4:1; 10:21). In Acts, all believers were filled with the Spirit on Pentecost (2:4; also 4:31; 13:52). Named individuals that were full of the Spirit in Acts were Peter, Stephen, Barnabas, and Paul (see Acts 4:8; 5:3; 6:5; 11:24; 13:9). By way of contrast, Satan also can “fill” persons; and so can wine, with disastrous effects (see Acts 5:3; Eph. 5:18).

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## ***Ephesians 5:19-21***

Just as the unholy influence of drunkenness results in unholy actions, so the holy influence of the Holy Spirit results in holy actions. One such result is singing and making music to the Lord. When Spirit-filled believers get together, they will love **speaking to one another** in encouraging words and music. **Psalms** likely refers to the Bible’s songbook—the Book of Psalms. **Hymns** are songs that praise God for His greatness and goodness. **Spiritual songs** include other kinds of Christian singing, for example, songs about our walk with the Lord.

A second result of Spirit-filled believers is giving thanks. Consider the following:

The time of thanks—**always**.

The Person to thank—**God the Father**.

The manner of thanks—**in the name of our Lord**. All our blessings come only through Jesus Christ.

The extent of thanks—**for everything**.

As God's children, we do not argue with Him when He permits suffering and evil. We trust Him and thank Him that His love can turn evil to good purposes (see Gen. 50:20; Rom. 8:28).

Some Bible students (and translators, as the Holman CSB shows) understand verse 21 as an additional result of the filling of the Spirit. Others interpret this verse as a separate emphasis. In either case, however, there's no doubt that Paul expected believers to be **submitting to one another**. The verb translated **submitting** means "to place under" or "to subordinate." It does not mean inferiority in any way.

In the Christian fellowship there is to be a willingness to learn from others, even from those who differ from us in age, gender, or station in life. We are called on to serve one another; so also are we to be willing to accept counsel and correction from others. An aggressive, arrogant attitude is the opposite of being careful in the way we live.

Being subject to one another within the body may be compared to what Paul said in Romans 12:10: "Outdo one another in showing honor." Christian submission is first to the Lord; because it is **in the fear of Christ** (out of reverence for Him) that we carry out everything we do as believers.

## SESSION 6: CONNECTED THROUGH PRAYER

### EPHESIANS 6:18-22

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#### *Ephesians 6:18*

Every soldier must be prepared mentally and psychologically for battle (see vv. 10-17). One way to prepare for spiritual warfare is to **pray**. Our prayer is to be **in the Spirit**—in the awareness of the presence and aid of the Holy Spirit (compare Rom. 8:26-27). Our prayer is not to be a rote recitation of memorized prayers. Our prayer is not to be routine. To pray **in the Spirit** means that our prayers are to be energized by communion with the Holy Spirit.

Four times in this verse Paul used Greek forms for "all" or "every."

All kinds of prayer. There is more than one way to talk to God. Here, the apostle used both a general term (**prayer**) and a specific term (**request**). The words prayer and request may refer to different kinds of prayer, but not necessarily. Either way, they certainly add emphasis to the importance of believers' praying.

All times of prayer. Paul encouraged the Ephesian believers (and us) to remain faithful in prayer. They were to **pray at all times**. There is no wrong time to pray! Morning prayers, mealtime prayers, bedtime prayers, and battle-time prayers are all acceptable. **All times** calls for praying unremittingly. It also refers to praying in every occasion and situation. Thus we are not merely to live as Christians; we also are to pray about all of our lives as Christians.

All perseverance in prayer. Followers of Jesus Christ constantly engage in spiritual warfare. We can never allow a moment to pass when we are not in an attitude of prayer. We must always **stay alert** in prayer, like a soldier expecting the enemy's attack at any moment. No matter how stiff the battle may become, we must exercise **all perseverance** in prayer to receive God's power moment by moment. Jesus Himself made this clear in the parable of the persistent widow (see Luke 18:1-8). This command may reflect Jesus' words to His disciples in Gethsemane when He urged them to "stay awake and pray" (Mark 14:38).

All objects of prayer. Our prayer is not to be only for ourselves. We are to engage in **intercession for all the saints**. If praying all the time acknowledges Christians' dependence on God (and it does), then praying for one another acknowledges our interdependence. Others need our prayers; we need their prayers.

Thus, Paul taught in this verse that we should pray **at all times**, whether or not we are under attack, using all kinds of prayers—public and private, formal and informal, praise and thanksgiving, requests for spiritual achievements and physical needs. With the ongoing spiritual conflict and God's provisions for that conflict in mind, we are to **stay alert** and never stop praying. In our prayers we should include **all the saints** wherever they may be, for they too are engaged in spiritual warfare.



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## Ephesians 6:19-20

Paul wanted the Ephesians to include him in their prayers. He too was engaged in spiritual battle. Perhaps as a prisoner he was tempted to be silent about his faith. He did not ask that they pray for his safety or freedom but that he be given fluency of words and fearlessness of heart in proclaiming the gospel. These two qualities would enable the ministry of the word to blaze forth. When he spoke, he wanted the right **message ... to be given**. He also wanted **boldness**, not shrinking from delivering what God had entrusted to him—which he recognized as **the mystery of the gospel**. Paul's two-fold request for clarity and boldness displays forcefully how much the supreme importance of the good news of salvation in Christ Jesus possessed Paul's mind. His concern was always for Jesus His Lord and for the gospel of Christ.

God had revealed to Paul **the mystery of the gospel** never previously revealed to human beings (see Eph. 3:3-5). We use the word mystery today to mean something we need to figure out or something we do not understand. In the New Testament the word has a different meaning. Mystery in the New Testament means a truth formerly hidden from human beings but now revealed by God. The mystery revealed to Paul included three great truths set forth in Ephesians. First, God will bring everything in heaven and earth under the lordship of Jesus Christ (see 1:9-10). Second, Gentiles are included with Jews in the body of Christ (3:6). Third, the church is spiritually united with Jesus Christ (5:32).

Earlier in the letter, Paul had called himself a "prisoner . . . on behalf of you Gentiles" (3:1) and "the prisoner in the Lord" (4:1). Now he called himself an **ambassador in chains**. As Paul wrote these words, he was chained to a guard 24 hours a day. The Greek word for chains refers to the manacles binding Paul to his guards with an eight-inch chain joining the cuffs on their wrists. In Acts 28:20 Luke used the same word for "chain" that Paul used here. As an ambassador, Paul was the accredited representative of Jesus Christ; and he would represent Christ before the emperor's court. Paul was an ambassador in chains because of **the gospel**. Even "in chains," Paul's primary concern was not his personal freedom but his God-given mission. He wanted more than anything else to declare the gospel fearlessly, as he should. Even Paul, as spiritually tough and strong as he was, could be intimidated by situations. He knew his human limitations and how much he needed the power of God and the prayers of his fellow believers.

Prayer is essential for Christians on mission. Paul called on the Ephesians to pray on a persistent basis and to pray for others, including himself. Surely we can see the urgency of such praying today. We need to make prayer a consistent priority, and that includes praying for one another and for the leaders of the church.

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## Ephesians 6:21-22

Paul's friend **Tychicus** was apparently the carrier of this letter to the Ephesians. Acts 20:4 reveals that Tychicus was a native of the province of Asia where Ephesus was located. He was with Paul in Greece and was one of the churches' representatives commissioned to take an offering to the believers in Jerusalem at the end of Paul's third missionary journey. He is also mentioned in Colossians 4:7; 2 Timothy 4:12; and Titus 3:12. Evidently, Tychicus carried not only the letter to the Ephesian church but also the letter to the Colossian church and the personal letter to Philemon.

Paul's high regard for Tychicus could not be concealed. He was a **dearly loved brother** (his horizontal relationships with others) and he was a **faithful servant in the Lord** (his vertical relationship to God). Paul put in writing a statement of his confidence in Tychicus to verify that oral news about Paul (how I am and what I'm doing) was reliable. When they received an update on his situation, it would **encourage** his readers. Not only did news from Tychicus encourage the Ephesians, but we can infer that the news they received helped them pray more specifically for the needs and ministry of Paul. Even today, congregations need news about God's work around the world, especially from people they have commissioned. This will encourage them to continue in their work for the Lord.